

Top Chef: Ice Cream Challenge — Milwaukee Public Library YA Program

Held in 2008 (48 participants), repeated in 2009 (62 participants)

Teens, design and name your signature ice cream flavor. We'll put your creations to a taste test and vote for the best!

2 hours planned for program

5 teams maximum – 4 maximum on each team. This was a really manageable size.

First 10-15 minutes – explaining rules, getting teams set, opening challenge.

Rules:

1. Wash hands before you start, and many times as you go through. Don't lick fingers, touch face, put hands in ice cream. If you do touch your face or something like that, wash hands immediately!
2. If you taste your creation to see what else you need to add, use a plastic spoon ONCE and throw it out. No double dipping! If any contestant is seen double-dipping, their team's creation will be disqualified from the competition.
3. You'll make an ingredient list to post by your ice cream. You MUST list every ingredient you use, no "secret ingredients" allowed. Taste testers, especially those who may have allergies, must know what they're eating.
4. Once an ingredient is gone, it's gone. Choose and use wisely!

Opening Challenge:

Each team given a list with 5 ice cream names on it (butter pecan, chocolate, mint chocolate chip, strawberry, vanilla) and had to put it in the order of most popular ice cream flavors in America (found on a .gov website). The team that did it first got to choose one advantage: either use chocolate ice cream instead of vanilla, or have exclusive use of one item on the toppings table. After the choice by the winner, teams were invited to come up to the table and select their toppings/mix-ins.

30 minutes – creation of flavor. (Here is where volunteer help was instrumental, in helping to smash candy bars for contestants)

45 minutes – let creations freeze, teens can create signs advertising their flavor and ingredient list, drum up interest in library. The teens/tweens went out into the library and invited people to come up and be judges. While they gathered judges, I scooped ice cream samples into Dixie cups marked with the team's number.

Last 30 minutes: we had 30 people come up; they received a spoon and a small paper ballot at the door. They voted after tasting all 5 ice creams by writing the number they liked best on the ballot.

Each team receives:

2 bowls and spoons for mixing

A few Ziploc bags to crush ingredients (I had anything that needs to be cut with a knife done beforehand)

A LOT of plastic spoons at each station to encourage "taste and toss"

Materials brought from home:

Mallet – for smashing ingredients

Rolling pin – for smashing ingredients, not as effective as mallet

Timer (we ended up not using, but you could use a timer to add more to the challenge/reality show feel)

Plastic cutting boards

Sharp knives (the librarian was the only one doing the cutting)

List to buy:

Ice cream – we used half gallon bricks, chopped in half. Each team started with one half-brick, and then we added a bit more since we had some ice cream leftover. This ended up easily providing 30 Dixie-cup samples, with some leftover ice cream for each team to enjoy afterwards.

You get the most bang for your buck at the Dollar Store! (I didn't use all of this, was a brainstorm list I took to the store. Feel free to improvise!)

Dixie cups and plastic spoons

Gladware to freeze ingredients (we used metal and plastic bowls for the actual mixing)

Napkins

Paper towels

Wooden/plastic spoons to mix ingredients

Candy bars to chop up

Chocolate/caramel/strawberry sauce

Mini marshmallows

Coconut

Chocolate /butterscotch/other kinds of chips

Cookie dough (buy a tube, chop it up)

Oreos/other cookies

Pineapple (crushed)

Cherries (maraschino)

Sprinkles

Bananas

Pretzels

Potato chips

Breakfast cereal (get pack of little boxes)

Prizes:

We used Culver's gift cards for each of the winning team members, but any local ice cream/custard shop would be appropriate. A small thank-you token for teen volunteers is also nice.

What I would change:

Have a "smashing station" at each team's table; let them handle their own candy bar/ingredient breaking. There was a bit of a bottleneck with teams waiting for me and the Teen Advisory Board volunteer to break everything. Allow more time or have another volunteer to prepare samples. It took 10 minutes longer for me to scoop samples into Dixie cups than I thought it would (I handled this to help maintain sanitary conditions)

Write out instructions on the board ahead of time.

Have the teams hand out their own samples and "sell" their creation – part of the marketing process.

Have more than one volunteer to answer questions and assist. This would be a great project for a Teen Advisory Board to run.

This is a great program to have teens work on the main part, but open up to any ages/families to be testers.